

Devoting Themselves To The Apostles Teaching

by Donny Coulter

This sermon emphasizes the importance of true biblical fellowship, rooted in a common bond with Jesus Christ. It highlights the need to rejoice and weep with one another, to hold each other in high esteem, and to actively seek opportunities to partner together in various aspects of church life. The message challenges the congregation to see each other as part of the body of Christ and to strive towards becoming a fellowshipping church.

Scripture: 1 John 1:3, 2 Peter 1:3, Romans 12:15, 1 Corinthians 12:25, Acts 2:41, Romans 12:10, Romans 12:15

Topics: "Biblical Fellowship", "Unity in Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Life has with it great times of difficulty. And we have some in our body right now who are walking through deep waters. I pray for Bobby and Casey right now.

As they face decisions and hurt and pain, God, I pray that you would meet them right now in this very moment right where they are. May they know and experience the presence of Christ. Above all, and overwhelming all, may they experience You.

I pray the same for our sister, Betty. Meet her right now where she is. I know her faith is strong.

But I pray that you would come alongside her right now, Father. Give her the strength that she needs to be able to face this. May she know that though we are not there in presence, we are with her.

And may Bobby and Casey understand the same thing. Now, Lord, thank You for Your Word. Help us, Father, to immerse ourselves in Your Word this morning.

Help us to jump in and see what You have to say to us. I pray that we would ask the question, is this who we are? Are we truly a fellowshiping church? I believe I know the answer to it. May Your Holy Spirit confirm and convict.

Spirit of the living God, may You be our teacher. Lead us into Your presence. We pray these things in the powerful and precious and holy, wonderful, mighty name of Jesus we pray.

Amen. Let's read together Acts 2, verses 40-47. As we begin to look at the distinctives.

Acts 2, verses 40-47. And with many other words, He bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation, preaching, proclaiming the Word of God. And so those who received the Word, so it's not just about proclaiming the Word, but it's also about what? Receiving the Word.

This is a two-way street. It's proclaiming and receiving. Those who received the Word were baptized and were added to the church, about 3,000 souls.

And they devoted themselves, or they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching. There is the studying, teaching, proclaiming church. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching.

And in fellowship, that's our distinctive today that we'll be talking about, fellowship. To the breaking of bread, which I am calling worship. And prayers.

Now look what happened when they began to live this way. Look what happens. Among them and around them, the results were, and awe, or fear, came upon every soul.

Not just the elders. Not just those who were close to God. Fear, awe, came upon every soul among them, and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

What a glorious thing to imagine and think about. And all who believed were together. Now, we're going to discover that definition defines function when it comes to fellowship.

Definition defines function. And the best way to define fellowship is to look at the Scripture that reveals the Word to us. And so that's what we're going to be doing today.

And all who believed were together. There's a word that you should take stock in. They were together.

And they had all things in common. I hope you will discover that we are not encouraging or pushing towards a commune living. Because that is not Scriptural.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. Wow, wow, wow. And day by day, attending the temple together.

Did you see that? What's the frequency? No, wait a minute. That's not the way it's supposed to work. It's supposed to be just on Sunday.

Well, in this church, this New Testament church, who was a fellowshiping church, day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, as they received their food with glad and generous hearts. Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

I want that kind of church. And I want to be that kind of believer. The second distinctive of the church, of the New Testament church here, was that they were a fellowshiping church.

Back there, remember, it says that they continued in fellowship steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in the teachings, and in fellowship. What does that word mean anyway? We call what we do on Sunday morning here, when you go and get a cup of coffee and stand around and talk about fast cars and fat cows, we sit there and we call that fellowship, but I want to caution you that that is not the definition of koinonia. Now that's the word that's used here in Acts chapter 2, when he says that they continued in fellowship, the word is koinonia.

And that word has a very special meaning. Word meanings change all the time. Since about 1910, there was a word that was used called lit.

When somebody was lit, they were high or they were drunk. How many of you remember it used in that context? If you went to a party when you were young, oh, Jerry, he got lit, man. He was out of it because he was so high.

And that's what it meant. And it meant that for years and years until recently, the meaning of lit has changed among young people. I hear them talking about, man, he was lit.

And I'm like, y'all can't be doing that. Because it meant something completely different. Now it means, man, he's right on.

He is on fire. He is cool. That's all right.

That's what it means to be lit. It means excellent. Now, that party was lit.

I mean, it was an excellent party. And so the names and words, definitions change over time. And this word that we use for fellowship has changed.

Because it does not have the biblical contextual meaning that it had when it says that they continued steadfastly in fellowship. Because fellowship goes much deeper than fast cars and fat cows. It is much, much deeper than having a drink of coffee and standing in the back and talking.

Now, I believe that that is a practical part of our fellowship, that it is only one way of outworking of fellowship. But that does not define fellowship. Koinonia Greek language is what the New Testament was written in.

And one of the reasons why that God chose Koinonia Greek is because it was the common language among everyone. Classical Greek, a lot of your classical Greek writings are in classical Greek. And, you know, scholars and those would study classical Greek, but they wouldn't study vulgar Koinonia, Koinonia Greek.

Koinonia Greek, because it was the language of the regular everyday person. It was a language that was spoken in the temple and in the courtyard. It was a language that was spoken in a Mediterranean ship.

It was a language that was spoken everywhere. It was koine, it was common. That's the word common.

And that's where we get the word koinonia, is sharing in common. God used a language that was common among people to write the story of the Gospel. Because it was a common language to everyone.

And so fellowship has with it the idea that we have something or someone in common that brings us together in partnership. And so there is, without getting too technical, that is the definition of koinonia, or fellowship, is to partnership in common. Okay? Follow with me on this.

It is a joint participation in things that are held common. Now there are lots of kinds of partnerships, right? So there's the business partnership. There's a worldly, we'll call it a worldly partnership.

And when you have a worldly partnership, it says, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. Right? I mean, that's what business is. Business is, I'll do this for you as long as you do this for me.

That's a worldly partnership. It oftentimes, a worldly partnership says, what can I get out of this relationship? That's a worldly partnership. But we're not talking about a worldly partnership.

We're talking about a Christ-centered partnership. And that Christ-centered partnership says, it has with it this spirit of generous giving. Remember, as we read through this, they sold their own possessions.

Because it was more important that other people's needs were met than for them to hold on to something. And so it was this idea of a spirit of generous giving contrasted to a spirit of selfish getting. And selfish getting is a worldly partnership, but generous giving is a godly partnership, a Christ-centered partnership.

And that giving that we see in this New Testament church, that giving of themselves and their possessions was based on one major factor, and that is Christ who is the common bond. It was based completely and totally around the relationship and the bond that they had in Christ. Look at chapter 2 and verse 44.

And all who believed were together, and they had all things in common. Now, they had all things in common because they had the major component of their commonality and their partnership was Christ. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing to the proceeds to all as any had need.

Why in the world would they do those kinds of things? Why would they do that? Look at chapter 4. It tells us why they would do that. Now, the multitude of those who believed... Now, I want you to gather with me. There wasn't just a few certain individuals that were like this because that's not reading true to the Scripture we just read.

Look at chapter 4, verse 32. Now, the multitude of those who believed. What does that say? The majority of those that believed.

Again, I want to ask us to ask ourselves the question, is this the kind of church we are? Do we have some generous people in our congregation? We sure do. But are the multitude of us generous when it comes? Are the multitude of us, are we generous like this? Look what it says. Now, the multitude of those who believed were of... Now, why would they give of their possessions, sell and give away to meet the needs is because, look what it says, they had one heart and they had one soul.

They were one together. Around the common bond of Jesus Christ, they were one together. And we're going to see, as Paul tells us, that they were so one together that when one hurt, they all hurt, and when one rejoiced, they all rejoiced.

Neither did anyone say that any of the things that he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. You see a theme consistently throughout this? Remember, definition defines function. And so

the Scripture is defining what fellowship is for us.

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all, nor was there any among them who lacked. Wow! There was never a moment when anyone lacked. For all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet and they distributed to each one as anyone had need.

And Joseph, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated the son of encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Just so you know that they were regular people, God gives us the name of an individual who did this very thing. And we know a little bit about Barnabas, the son of encouragement.

Now here's the deal. They were one heart. They were one soul.

And they were centered around the one thing that brought them all in common, no matter what lifestyle they came from, whether it was rich or poor, whether it was rabbi or follower, the one thing, the commonality that brought them together was Jesus Christ and their relationship with Him. And this was not, listen, this was not a selling out and living in a commune. That's a cop-out.

That's a cop-out from Scripture. We don't see that as an example of what they were doing. Because they went from house to house throughout the city on a daily basis.

They didn't sell out and move to a commune. They held, listen to this, they held so tightly to one another. They held on so tightly to one another that they did not need to hold on to their stuff.

When someone was in need, the church, in fellowship around Christ, responded. I may have told you this story before. You'll probably hear it again through the years.

But the church that sent us away from Nashville, Lighthouse, had very humble beginnings. They started with a small group of people in an apartment complex in the community center of an apartment complex there in Antioch, Tennessee. The church began to grow quickly.

It's life began to take place. Shape. And it began to grow quickly.

And quickly they outgrew the community center where they were at. And so they began to look for land to be able to officially start their church. They ended up having some property down on a corner just down from the apartment complex.

Right next to the interstate. Visible for everybody to see. And the pastor went out there.

He went out there and he fasted in a tent for 27 days. As they felt the leading of God to go after the property, they came back together in that community center. They had no money and no ability to go get a loan.

And so the challenge was put to them. What does God want us to do? The pastor's wife, in response to a move of the Holy Spirit, took her wedding ring off and marched down to the altar and laid her wedding ring on the altar. Dana says that her mother was not very happy at all.

But she laid that ring there and sold it so that the church could do what they believed God had led them to do. That's fellowship. That's not holding so tightly onto our stuff, but holding tightly onto one another and

onto Christ that our stuff means nothing to us.

Tertullian wrote that the Romans sent spies into the church to see what it was all about. These spies went in and then they came out and gave a report that sounded something like this. Those people, they don't worship idols.

There's only one that they worship and He's not even there. And they worship Him. And Him only.

And man, oh man, do those people love one another. If spies were sent in among us, what would the message be? Definition defines function. I've got to hurry.

I'm so sorry. No, I'm not. I'm not sorry.

I've been out for two weeks, so you're going to get caught up today. I keep saying I'm sorry. Definition defines function.

Okay? Definition defines function. Koinonia. I want to give you some illustrations that will help us to understand the practical working of fellowship.

What is not fellowship and what is fellowship. Koinonia, true fellowship. There are four parts of fellowship.

They share themselves with Christ in a marriage relationship. They share in the provision of Christ through the Holy Spirit. They share themselves and their possessions with one another.

And then they share the provision of Christ with others. Now, I went through that quickly for the sake of time, but I want you to see it, physically see it. Here's the first one.

In this illustration, is this true fellowship? Help me out. Is this true fellowship? In this illustration, is this true fellowship? It is not, is it? Did you know that this is a business partnership? Anybody can do this, can't they? We can share the resources among one another and never have a relationship with Jesus, a return relationship with Jesus. This is not fellowship.

This is just doing stuff for people. Isn't it? This is not biblical fellowship. This is not biblical fellowship.

Is it? What's missing? Okay, yeah, believer to believer is missing, but there's also something else missing. Believer to Christ. There is no relationship with Jesus.

That means, to me, the picture of this is how many of us come to church on Sunday and receive from Christ, but never have a relationship with Jesus. We don't have a relationship with Jesus. We have a religion.

And so we show up to church and we receive and the Spirit continually is always bombarding our hearts to come in relationship, but we do not. This is not fellowship. We cannot have biblical fellowship with this as the beginning of our fellowship.

Is this biblical fellowship? Now we're receiving from Christ and we're giving to one another. It's still not biblical fellowship because there is no relationship. And the common bond is actually missing from this.

And the common bond is that relationship with Jesus. Now watch. Just so you know, I added this in here.

I almost forgot. I added this in here. Did you know you can do that without ever knowing? You can give stuff away and you can be generous and all of that stuff and not have a relationship at all with Jesus.

Jesus said so, didn't He? Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? Cast out demons in Your name? And done many wonders in Your name? Have we not? Believer to believer, have we not been doing that? And Jesus will look. Then I will declare to them, I never knew you depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. Yes, a church can be doing a lot of those things and still not be in biblical fellowship.

So, now we're missing something else now. This is not biblical fellowship. Now we've come into relationship with Jesus.

We're not just receiving from Jesus. We are also giving back to Jesus. We are in a reciprocal relationship with Jesus, but we have not learned to be in a reciprocal relationship, a participation in common with Jesus with one another.

This is often where I see our church. This is true biblical fellowship that I am receiving from Christ. And I am living in marriage relationship with Christ.

And that part of this is the common bond for every believer. Because I have this relationship going on, I can have this relationship between us. Because I am receiving from Christ and I am giving back in Christ.

I am in relationship with Him. I am in a marriage relationship with Him. I now can do that.

I now can consider my fellow brother, my fellow sister, I can consider their needs above my own. Because I am in a common relationship with Jesus together. How in the world do we do that? That was really fast.

But it is what it is. How do we do that? How can we achieve this kind of fellowship? 1 John 1 That which was from the beginning we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked upon with our hands and handled concerning the word of life. The life, oh I love that, the life was manifested.

Look, the Father and the Son had eternal fellowship together forever. They had always had eternal fellowship. You get the picture? The Father and the Son, they are in eternal fellowship always together.

And then the life was manifested to us. That fellowship, that eternal Godhead fellowship was manifested to us in the life of Jesus. And we have seen and we bear witness and we declare to you the eternal life which was the Father and was manifested to us.

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us. You see the picture of the triangle? That you may have fellowship with us. The Godhead had the fellowship.

He came down and became one of us. And when He became one of us it opened up the opportunity for us to enter into the relationship with the Divine. And this is where I am overwhelmed in this kind of a message.

And He says, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. The Father and the Spirit had fellowship for eternity. Jesus came as one of us.

He fellowshiped with us in the flesh. With us He fellowshiped in flesh. He had common with us.

Do you get that? The Godhead came as one of us. He fellowshiped with us. As one of us.

And then He gave us the opportunity through that fellowship as one of us. He gave us the opportunity to have fellowship with the Father. Look at 2 Peter.

Come on. 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 3 and 4. As His Divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. You think you're missing something? You ain't.

Right here tells me that you've got everything you need in Christ. For whatever it is that you're facing in life and in godliness. Let's continue.

Through the knowledge of Him who has called us by glory and virtue by which have been given to us the exceedingly great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature. Stop a second. That word right there, partakers.

Anybody venture to guess what it is? Koinonia. Well, actually it's a different form. But it is fellowship.

Look what He says. That through these you may be fellowshippers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption of the world through lust. Think about that truth for just a minute.

Think about that for just a second. That me, this horrible separated from God forever sinner has been afforded through Christ who came common with me in the flesh has opened up the opportunity and the door for me to partake in the divine nature of God. That should make us all stand and shout and run around and become Pentecostal.

Because we as sinners have been afforded the opportunity to fellowship with the God of the universe. We have entered into common ground with God. That's mind-blowing.

Mind-blowing for me to think about. God has allowed me to partake to fellowship in His nature. And maybe it's because I realize how ugly and sinful and horrible I am.

I don't know what it is. But I know that it's overwhelming to me. The Holman Treasury of Keywords says this unique fellowship between God and Jesus began in eternity, was manifested in time through the incarnation of Jesus, was introduced to the apostles, and then introduced to each and every believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And now because I have entered into relationship and you have entered into relationship, we now have a common bond in Christ. Do you get it? Do you know why we can have fellowship? Because I partake in the divine nature and you partake in the divine nature and we partake together. Amen? There is the commonality of our bond.

That which shapes in common is not a building. It is not a Bible study. It is not a denomination.

It is not a name of a church. It is Jesus Christ and Him alone. That's what shapes the common bond between us.

And out of that common bond comes our contribution to one another in prayer, in service to one another, in giving of money, in encouraging one another, in supporting one another. It's out of that commonality comes all of that. And that should translate, listen to me for a moment, I know I'm going long, but that should translate into other believers, especially the young believers.

This is key. Evangelism or the proclamation, remember they were a proclaiming church? They were a studying, teaching, proclaiming church? Evangelism is not complete without drawing the converts into fellowship. Do you get that? Do you understand that? Our evangelism is not complete by getting somebody to say yes to Jesus.

That's not the completion of evangelism. Evangelism is completed when we take that new convert and we draw them into fellowship with the church. When we draw them into that common bond with us.

That's why it's so important you think about Acts chapter 2 verse 41 it says 3,000 souls. What if you had 3,000 souls and you just said, hey guys, welcome to Jesus, have fun. And there's 3,000 baby Christians out running around not knowing a thing to do.

And that is not the way the church is supposed to operate. We bring them in. Oh man, we got our camp kids and we have these camp kids that come in for five days and they get peace and love.

I'm seeing a couple of them back there. You don't know what to do. We got these camp kids and we've been able in years past to give them some peace and love and belonging.

And then at the end of the five days we send them away. And wait for another 360 days. Well, this time, a few more than that.

Before we bring them back together. And that is not the way it's supposed to be. Here's concluding remarks.

It is important that we have all of the elements of fellowship working to truly experience on the local church level to experience a balanced unit. A balanced unit that's experiencing the fullness of koinonia. Okay, I want to be careful in saying this.

Because I do not want the pulpit to become a political pulpit. But I cannot preach or teach a message about biblical fellowship without saying this. That COVID, that our government policies and the media hype has taught us exactly the opposite of biblical fellowship.

It has taught us exactly the opposite of what we should be doing and living as a church. And there is much more I would love to say but I will not. Romans chapter 12 and verse 15.

This is what fellowship looks like. On a practical level, this is what fellowship looks like. Romans 12 and verse 15.

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. There's a reason why my heart is hurting for Bobby and Casey as they face horrible circumstances. First Corinthians chapter 12 verse 25 and 26.

That there should be no schism in the body. No division in the body. But that the member should have the same care one for another.

And if one member suffers, then all the members suffer with it. Or if one member is honored, then all the members rejoice with it. When somebody's hurting, we gather around.

And if somebody needs to go to a special surgery down in the United States because we can't do it here in Canada and it's going to cost \$25,000 and the church doesn't have but \$15,000. Somebody has got something they could sell for \$10,000 to send that family down to the States to be able to have a surgery.

Imagine church working like that.

But it should. That should not be something far-fetched. That should be how we live.

They mutually identified with one another. They rejoice with the happy and they weep with the sad. They suffer with those who are suffering.

And they rejoice with those who are honored. Practically, what does that mean to Creekside? Here's my challenge. Number one, we need to see each other as a body.

As one. Would you look around right now? Look. I want you to look at each other.

I know it's uncomfortable and weird. And fancy preachers do this stuff all the time. And I'm not a fancy preacher.

But I want you to look at one another and I want you to see a common bond of Christ. You are the body of Christ. That person that you looked at.

They are the part of your body. And because they are part of your body, they deserve to be fellowshiped with. The second thing is, we must begin to hold one another in high esteem.

Why did they sell things and give it away? Because they held those who were hurting and those who were lacking, they held them in high esteem above themselves. And we have to do the same. Even with the people that you disagree with.

Lastly, we need to seek opportunity. We need to start seeking opportunity to partner together. Whether that's Bible study, care for others, evangelism, missions, planning.

We need to begin to determine ways that we can get together and partner so that we can become this kind of church. Now, after hearing all of that, would you agree with me that we are probably not a great example of a New Testament fellowshiping church? Then we need to do better. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your Holy Spirit and His direction. I do pray that You would take the time that I've used up in the lives of Your people. And I pray that Your Holy Spirit would take that and multiply it.

In truth and in challenge, I pray that we would begin to see one another differently. That when we look across the church, we would see Jesus, the common bond. And we would desire to know that person's name.

That we would desire to know that person's needs. We're not there right now, Lord. I pray that You would help us not to be so busy about life and not to be so scared about life right now.

That we find ourselves separated from who You are and who Your people are. God, may You challenge us that we might enter into real relationship with You and with one another. I want to be a fellowshiping church.

And to do that, I need to become a fellowshiping individual. Don't let me get away with it, Lord. Open myself up to You and Your conviction.

May You do the same for all of us. We pray these things now. In Jesus' wonderful, holy name.

Amen.

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